

give 'em teeth like  
you taught me

janeives

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**Summary:**

Richie Tozier isn't exactly well-versed in what to do when a kid in short-shorts and a fanny pack has a panic attack in the school bathroom — but if he could swing at away that motherfucking clown like he was trying to break the national batting average record regardless of his inexperience, then he can do this too.

Or: They're both hurting. Of course they are. What matters now, Richie supposes, is that they have each other.

## give 'em teeth like you taught me

*My Summer Experience: How I Learned About the Fourth Hole, an essay by Richie Tozier.*

Said essay is what gets him sent to the principal's office on this, the third day of the new school year. Day three of the one-hundred and eighty required per school year by Derry's education system and if the first few are any indication, this year is gonna be a long one. If any of the others were here, he could probably make that into a joke. *"This year's gonna be longer than Bill's wang, fellas, I can already feel it. Maybe even almost as long as mine."* But they're not, so he says it in his head and laughs at his own joke.

Truth be told, the final title was pretty tame compared to what *actually* happened over the summer. Richie had plenty of other working titles, too. *My Summer Experience: How My Friends and I Were Almost Murdered by a Psychotic Clown. My Summer Experience: This Shitty Town Is Actually Built on a Pile of Dead Kids.* Or maybe even *My Summer Experience: Let's Talk About the Time I Literally Saw Betty Ripsom's Half-Eaten Corpse Hanging from the Ceiling.* That last one would probably warrant more than a detention. Richie is still dealing with a surprisingly crippling amount of guilt for the jokes he'd made the morning they'd found her missing shoe in the Barrens. It's one thing to joke about dead people and another thing entirely to actually see them.

He doesn't really like thinking about it, now that he knows just how Betty died — alone, afraid, shivering and dripping with sewer water. It could've been him, or Beverly, or Bill, or *all* of them. The thought scratches persistently at the back of his mind.

Richie is sitting cross-legged on the bench outside the office, trying hard to knock those thoughts clean out of his head when he hears it from the bathroom just down the hall. This bathroom in particular has always exuded a strange, dark energy and in turn is rarely used; rumor has it that at least half a dozen kids give themselves bladder infections each school year just to avoid using it. Richie thinks that statistic is probably on the low side.

A whimper, like a kicked puppy. Richie somehow doubts that a dog has somehow managed to sneak onto school property.

He feels his breath catch in his throat, suddenly overwhelmed by the hesitation, the bone-deep *terror* he hasn't been able to shake since his encounter with It. Even now, with the danger presumably dead and gone and buried deep underground, he can't make himself as careless as he was before. He'll get there soon. Someday. Hopefully.

Another sniffle, then a *gasp*. Then another, and another, and holy shit, is someone actually dying in there?

Or maybe It isn't really dead, then. It's still here, having somehow clawed its way out of the well to fuck with him one last time. Luring him into the bathroom. It's a direct pipeline to the sewers, after all.

If he had a baseball bat, Richie would charge in there and club that greasy-haired bastard over the head until its brains burst and splattered all over the bathroom floor. All he actually has is the worn-down pencil nub in his pocket.

It'll do. He's done more with less.

His shoes squeal obnoxiously against the floor the second he walks into the poorly lit bathroom, and Richie winces. It's empty, or at least it seems to be — the whimpers go silent for several long seconds before starting up again, softer this time, as if they're being muffled against the back of someone's hand. His fingers travel to his pocket, curling around the pencil defensively, and then he cuts to the chase and half-kicks the handicap stall door open. If he has to go full John McClane this time to get rid of this fucking clown for good, he will.

But instead of coming face to face with twenty more clown statues and the son of a bitch himself, he's greeted by the sight of a bug-eyed Eddie Kaspbrak balanced precariously on the edge of the toilet seat.

Richie's guard crumbles into nothing almost immediately.

"Eds?" he breathes, caught somewhere between suspicion and relief, as the stall door swings shut noisily behind him. "What the fuck are you doing in here, dude?"

Eddie just lets out another quiet sob, and the look in his eyes is as piercing as it is hazy, something far away. Richie knows that look. He's at Eddie's side in an instant, bathroom tiles cold and unforgiving against his knees.

"Hey, Eddie," he mumbles, concern rising up like a closed fist in his own throat. "I'm here. Hey, I'm here. You're fine."

"You really think your s-stupid face is gonna help?" Eddie rasps, startling a laugh out of him. "Leave me alone."

"Look at you! In the throes of an asthma attack and still sharp as a whip. 'Atta boy," Richie praises, clapping him on the back lightly. He lets his hand linger there a moment instead of moving it away, smoothing circles against Eddie's back through his shirt as he reaches for the fanny pack cinched around the other boy's waist. It's new, undoubtedly a replacement for the one he'd tossed angrily into the bushes at the Neibolt house, but this time there's no aspirator to close his fingers around. Richie feels his face twist in confusion. "Where's your inhaler?"

Eddie just shakes his head, closes his eyes as another breath hisses through his teeth. His fingers curl into the fabric of his shorts as he lowers himself off the lip of the toilet seat and into a crouch next to Richie.

"Eds," Richie presses, "I can go get the nurse. I'm sure you've got a few connections over there."

"No! Absolutely fucking not." Richie is surprised at both the sudden intensity with which Eddie speaks and the strength with which he grips Richie's forearm — for someone so tiny, he's awfully strong.

"You sure? Totally sure? She's not *that* bad-looking..."

"No. I mean, yes. Yeah, I'm sure. I don't want it and I'm not going to the stupid nurse's office."

"Want and need are two different things, Spaghetti."

"Since when were you a fucking scholar, Trashmouth? I said I don't *fucking* want it," Eddie repeats, too loud in the open silence of

the bathroom, voice cracking.

"I never really took you for a masochist. That's almost as kinky as the stuff your mom is into." Richie says wryly. Normally this is where Eddie would push him, but instead he's just sucking in another wet lungful of air. It sounds unnervingly like a sob. Richie mentally kicks himself for not shutting up sooner, can hear his father's voice chastising him. *Stupid, stupid, stupid.*

"The pills," Eddie mutters finally, pulling his pill box from his fanny pack and trailing shaking fingers over each day. "They're fakes, Richie. Puh...ple...pla- *placebos*." Before Richie can ask, Eddie finishes, "*Bullshit*. It means they're fucking bullshit. Every single one of them." He looks up, eyes huge and watery.

Now it's Richie who can't breathe. "What...what do you mean?"

"I mean I don't need them. I never did. None of the...all of the stuff she told me, my mom. It was all *lies*." Another shaking sigh. "And I should hate her, and I do, or, at least like. I hate her for it. But I don't hate her, and I told her I wouldn't take them anymore and she looked so *sad* -"

"Fuck that," Richie cuts in angrily. The realization of what Eddie is saying is making him feel hot all over with slowly-settling anger.

"You didn't see her face that night I ran out to help find Bev. You didn't see her fucking face. So you don't get to talk, okay?"

"No," Richie snaps, feeling his own anger boil over. His voice shakes with it, pitch rising. "It's not - that's not *fair*. You could've been outside playing or swimming or chasing squirrels or-"

"Shut *up*, Richie. I get it," Eddie snarls back. His breaths are starting to hitch microscopically and Richie really does not want to be the reason he falls back into a panic attack but it's starting to look like that's the case when tears spring to Eddie's eyes. "She...she—*ruined*—me," he gasps, throwing the box to the ground and for a moment all they can do is stare as pills of every color scatter across the bathroom floor.

*She ruined me.* The words hit Richie hard enough to bruise and then he's wrapping his arms around his friend's trembling frame, pulling him close enough that he can feel Eddie panting damply against his collarbone.

"Eddie, *no*," Richie says, curling a hand around the back of Eddie's neck. "No, no, no, don't say that. Don't - she *didn't*, Eddie, she *couldn't* ruin you, not ever." It's his own voice that trembles and threatens to break, now, disbelief and anger landing blow after blow on his conscience. Richie has *seen* it, the way these medications and fabricated illnesses and Mrs. Kaspbrak's ever-hovering countenance have squeezed every ounce of joy and ease from Eddie's life.

He recalls the way Bill had gripped his shoulders in the Neibolt house, how he'd drawn Richie's gaze away from the poster he held in shaking fingers — his own name, in screaming black letters, *MISSING!* Bill, gentle-spoken and patient, is good at this sort of thing. He's a mother hen by nature, and that's nice and all, but Richie is...not.

His knee-jerk reaction has always been to make a joke, but it doesn't really seem all that funny anymore. Not when he thinks about Mrs. Kaspbrak locking her son away, shaping him into something small and sickly and afraid. And this — refusing his inhaler and choosing, however poor a choice it may be, to fight this battle on his own — is his own rebellion. Small, shaky, but rebellion nonetheless. Richie feels his chest swell with pride.

"You're okay. Not *ruined*," he says again, the word bitter and ugly on his tongue, moving so that he still has an arm around Eddie's shoulders before easing them both towards the floor. He's surprised when Eddie moves easily, not a hint of resistance in the usual rigidity of his posture. "If you don't want your inhaler then you don't have to have it. Just breathe with me, then. *Slow*."

Eddie's head droops to rest on his shoulder as he swallows thickly. "Thanks."

"Anytime, Spaghetti." He looks down at the boy with his head on his shoulder, hair tickling Richie's nose, and can't help the oncoming rush of affection that settles on him in a golden wash. He tries not to

think about what that means, if it means anything at all. "Seriously, though. Breathe slow, 'cause I'm not gonna carry you out of here if you faint."

"Will too," Eddie mumbles quietly. He's absolutely right, but Richie will sooner drink the entire bowl's worth of toilet water than admit it.

"Nope. I'd leave you here for the next sorry sap who uses this stall to find, and everyone's gonna think you died taking a shit."

Eddie punches his shoulder lightly, and Richie smiles, slides their fingers together like they haven't done in a few years. It's just one of those things they've grown out of, the kind of thing they finally realized they were too old to be doing anymore. In the silence that follows, punctuated only by Eddie's gradually-slowing sniffles, Richie feels one knot in his chest start to loosen only to be replaced by another.

"Richie."

"Yep, that's right. Your ol' pal Trashmouth Tozier is here to take care of you."

"*Richie.*"

"Yeah, Eds."

Eddie lowers his voice to a whisper. "Someone's coming."

And then Richie hears it, the telltale sound of heels clacking in the hall, drawing nearer. Eddie claps his free hand over Richie's mouth preemptively before he can open it, and together they inch their way into the corner of the stall, pressing themselves all the way against the far wall. It's familiar in an unfamiliar place, the bump of knobby knees and gangly limbs.

"Hello? Who's in there?" A pause, waiting for a response that never comes. "There's a five-minute limit on bathroom breaks." Her voice is vaguely familiar, a teacher Richie has maybe heard in passing or at an assembly.

Eddie's palm is slightly clammy against his mouth, and Richie



considers licking it just to get him off. But that would probably send him into another near-asthmatic episode, so he decides against it, instead huffing a breath through his nose and giving the other boy a baleful look. He can almost see his headstone now. *HERE LIES RICHIE "TRASHMOUTH" TOZIER, 1976-1989. HE DIED AS HE LIVED — COMPLETELY WHIPPED FOR EDDIE KASPBRAK.*

The thought startles him, but it's not exactly untrue.

It feels like an eternity before the teacher in the doorway heaves a defeated sigh, and the sound of her heels clicking against the linoleum fades. Richie leaves an obnoxiously loud, smacking kiss on Eddie's palm before he can pull his hand away, lips brushing against the slightly raised skin of the healing scab line there.

"I hate you." Eddie scowls at him, pushing himself off the wall and heading for the stall door.

"Come on. You've been in this bathroom for at least fifteen minutes now but you're more worried about the germs on my *mouth*?" Richie's face contorts into an expression of mock offense as he follows Eddie out of the stall, watching as he begins to methodically scrub his hands in the sink.

The faucet squeals obnoxiously, but the water doesn't come out brown or black or blood red, so that's a plus. This bathroom really isn't even that bad. Maybe they can use it as a rendezvous spot for -

*For what, Richie?*

"I'm already freaked out about the bathroom, and your germy chapped lips aren't doing me any favors."

"Chapped?" Richie scoffs. He rolls his eyes. "I'll have you know your mom has never complained *once* about my -"

"Didn't take you long to hop right back on the 'your mom' jokes, did it, Trashmouth?" Eddie glowers at him, but there's a playful bite in his voice that's been missing since the beginning of this conversation that makes Richie's stomach flutter with relief.

"Sorry. Old habits die hard. I'll work on it." Richie waves his hand

noncommittally.

"Maybe if you drank actual water as much as you do Ecto-Cooler your lips would be softer."

"I've never had anyone care so much about my lip hydration before. You sure know how to make a boy feel special, Spaghetti." Richie's lashes flutter dramatically, and, yeah, this conversation has taken kind of a weird turn. He gets flustered, suddenly, under Eddie's sharp gaze, and moves to pick up the pills from the floor just to give himself something to do. Each one feels like a million pounds in his hands, and he can't stop thinking about how they're bullshit, all of them, and how Eddie has choked them down day after day for years because he's always trusted his mother to protect him and that's what parents are supposed to *do*. His stomach is in knots again. The pills are all a little damp, some of them starting to dissolve in Richie's palms, but he still waits for Eddie's nod of approval before flushing them down the toilet with a quiet *woo-hoo*.

"I'm gonna do back to class now," Eddie mumbles finally, running his fingers idly over this surface of his cast, *LOSER* in big bold letters.

"See you later, handsome." He swallows the bile gathering under his tongue and waggles his fingers, putting his own healing palm on display, the wound he's accidentally reopened more times than he can count.

"Hey, Richie?"

"Hmm?"

"Thanks."

"For the handsome thing or the other stuff?"

Eddie rolls his eyes. "The other stuff, dipshit. Just...thanks."

"Anytime, Eds."

There's another half-second of silence before Eddie goes shuffling off down the hall. Before he turns the corner, he casts him one last glance — sweet and goofy and a little wistful, too.

And Richie, running his finger lightly over the scab on his palm, won't think about what that means right now, only how it makes him feel.

### **Author's Note:**

so i finally saw this the other night and i absolutely loved it. i'm a huge stephen king fan and i think the original 90's miniseries is actually pretty good (tim curry is fucking terrifying, okay) and so i knew i'd love this film but i wasn't prepared for just how much i'd love it.

also, these two were cute. i mean, they all were (and i hope every single child actor in this film has a long and fruitful career ahead of them because they were all brilliant.) but these two. these fucking two!!